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SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT PATASSE CALLS ON THE AMBASSADOR

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Former President of the Central African Republic (CAR) Ange-Felix Patasse called on the Ambassador on Monday, November 16, 2009. In the course of an hour and half long visit Patasse affirmed his friendship with the United States, blamed the French for his downfall, and stressed his utility to U.S. foreign policy -- specifically concerning Libya. The Ambassador stressed that the United States supported institutions and processes, not individuals. He noted that the United States recognizes only one elected government in the CAR; that of Francois Bozize and was opposed to any attempt to change the government by non-constitutional means. He repeated our three main messages: Armed groups must cease hostilities and participate in the political process; the government must foster development and protect human rights, and the CAR must look to the private sector, not international assistance to finance its development. Patasse was effusive and flattering and said that he hoped that there could be future meetings. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) On November 12, 2009, former CAR president Ange-Felix Patasse "convoked" the Ambassador to meet him at his residence. The Ambassador declined the convocation, but replied that he would be willing to meet the former president at the chancery. On November 16, Patasse came to the chancery with an escort of about ten troops from an international PKO force (MICOPAX) in full battle dress and body armor. He was accompanied by a large delegation. The Ambassador admitted only Patasee, his wife, his Foreign Minister, and three advisors to the office - all others were excluded.

¶3. (SBU) Patasse began by affirming his friendship with the United States, naming all of the U.S. Presidents, Secretaries of State, and Assistant Secretaries for African Affairs with whom he had worked. He expressed great admiration for President Obama and took much credit for facilitating the U.S. rapprochement with Libya. He quoted the adage that one can choose one's friends, but not one's family. He then characterized Kaddafi as "African family" and the United States as a friend. Patasse was very proud of a meeting that he claimed to have organized in Bangui where he left the U.S. and Libyan negotiators in a room

with the warning that they would not be allowed to leave until they had produced an agreement. One of the messages of his visit was that, if elected, he would be helpful to the United States in relations with Kaddafi, whom he referred to repeatedly as "The Guide."

14. (SBU) He presented the Ambassador with hard copies of three position papers on the upcoming CAR elections:

- A project to use satellite telephones and computers to transmit polling results from 6,000 polling stations to Bangui;
- A call for a new census to establish new lists of voters; and
- A demand that all Central African refugees and internally displaced persons be allowed to vote.

These color documents featured Patasse's portrait on the cover and were datelined Tripoli, 23 September, 2009 and Bangui, 6 November. The first paper proposed a \$10 million satellite telephone network to transmit election results to Bangui. (Note: Less than \$7 million has been pledged in international assistance for the elections, and the government has committed a little more than \$2 million. End Note.) The second paper is a careful review of the current electoral situation and calls for a new census to establish a list of voters and various other reforms -- this is a serious issue since there are no viable lists remaining from the last elections. The third paper calls for the CARG and the international community to develop mechanisms to assure that internally displaced persons (IDP) and refugees can vote in the upcoming elections. This, too, is a serious issue as there are well over 200,000 Central African IDPs and refugees. It is not at all unreasonable for Patasse to assume that his supporters make up the majority of these people and want to be sure that they can vote.

15. (SBU) Patasse blamed the French for his political troubles, claiming that they had sabotaged his government from the beginning, but he did not elaborate. This is nothing new and it

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is very clear that the French are not at all pleased to see him back in Bangui. Patasse said that he would be running as an independent, but did not spend any time attacking Martin Ziguele, the leader and official presidential candidate of the political party that Patasse founded (the MLPC).

16. (SBU) In response, the Ambassador stressed that the United States supported institutions and processes, not individuals. This point is especially important as Patasse and his partisans have always made much of U.S. Ambassador Daniel Simpson's energetic (and successful) efforts to force then-President Kolingba to hold elections in 1992. (Patasse was elected president in 1993, after Kolingba's efforts to corrupt the first elections were exposed.) Because these elections would never have taken place without Ambassador Simpson's intense personal efforts, the MLPC has sometimes tried to present itself as the party of the United States and has, on occasion, offered implied criticism of the current U.S. ambassador for not giving them public support. The Ambassador went on to stress that the United States recognizes only one elected government in the CAR -- that of Francois Bozize -- and is opposed to any attempt to change the government by any non-constitutional means. The Ambassador repeated our three main messages: Armed groups must cease hostilities and participate in the political process; the government must foster development and protect human rights, and the CAR must look to the private sector, not international assistance to finance its development. The first of these messages is especially important as Patasse is widely seen as the inspiration for, if not actually connected with, the Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD), the major rebel group in the northwest of the country.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Patasse was confident, charming, and flattering in the extreme. It is clear that despite years of exile, Patasse still feels very presidential as witnessed by his initial "convocation" of the Ambassador. During the course of the conversation, he said that he would be "convoking" the other ambassadors in Bangui. Indeed, the Chinese ambassador went to meet Patasse at Patasse's residence, where, as might be

expected, Patasse stressed his long abiding friendship for China. The Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations received Patasse at her office, not his. The French Ambassador, Dean of the Corps, has not decided whether to meet Patasse at all.

18. (SBU) Patasse attached great importance to his relationship with Kaddafi and seemed rather oblivious to the possibility that the U.S. might not/not be entirely favorably inclined towards a Central African head of state who was close to Libya. Similarly, he did not seem consider the possibility that it was this very closeness to the Libyans (and Bemba's Congolese rebels) that made his overthrow popular with many Central Africans. One of his initial demands as a condition of his return to Bangui was a security detail from CEN-SAD; Kaddafi's new African organization ([http://www.cen-sad.org/new/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=33&Itemid=76](http://www.cen-sad.org/new/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=33&Itemid=76)). The Central African government is very aware of the Patasse/Kadaffi connection and quite ready blame many of its problems with rebel groups on "foreign" money and influence.

19. (SBU) Patasse's return to Bangui is the subject of great interest and speculation in the media and in the street. As reported previously, popular theories include:

1A. He really thinks that he can win the election as an independent.

1B. He has cut a deal with Bozize -- he spoils Martin Ziguele's chances and Bozize will let him reclaim his lost properties.

1C. He cut a deal with Ziguele - we just don't know what it is yet.

Following the rule that one should always look for the simplest answer, we would have to rank the probability of these theories in the order presented, even if the second seems the most reasonable. END COMMENT.

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